



County of Ottawa

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February 25, 2019

Ms. Sarah Leach
Holland Sentinel
54 W. 8th St
Holland, MI 49423

Ms. Sarah Leach,

As a group we are declining your request. We have at least two serious shared concerns about this forum as proposed:

#1 - It is inevitable that questions will arise about the recent shooting death in Holland Township that the Sheriff's Investigative Unit is investigating and will eventually proceed through the court system. The Sheriff's Office and the Prosecutor will be legally restricted from sharing information about the investigation and case. In our shared experiences, this can tend to further frustrate and anger the community that wants specific answers about the event and investigation. We are also sensitive to protecting the family's privacy while they cope with their tragic loss. This public forum so soon after such an event will not help the investigation and may increase tensions in the community and cause unneeded stress on the victim's family.

#2 - Having the Sentinel serve as a moderator for such an event seems unusual and problematic. Connected to item #1, a moderator that could be perceived as having a self-interest in asking questions is problematic, and seems more like a press conference than a forum.

We would suggest that further time before an event is held should be considered. If we were to consider being part of such a forum the panel would mutually agree on who facilitates the panel discussion and agreement on the questions and format, to maintain the integrity of the process. We also believe additional time would allow for the focus on the apprehension of the suspect and for further information to be shared with the public as it becomes available.

We also want to underscore that the Sheriff's Office and HDPS have been in communication with MANY members of the community to both investigate the crime, and to monitor and help the community stay safe in the aftermath. This specifically includes being in contact with all of the other proposed panelists (Escape, Maple Avenue Ministries, school officials and the Boys and Girls Club). We mention this simply to make clear that there has been and continues to be conversations on these important topics with our community members to focus on keeping our community and schools safe.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Steve Kempker

Ottawa County Sheriff's Office

Chief Matt Messar

Holland Department of Public Safety

Mr. Brian Davis

Superintendent

Holland Public Schools

Mr. Thomas Martin

Superintendent

West Ottawa Public Schools